

the retail market. However, in making that calculation, the cost of the strategy, in terms of foregone profits is generally ignored.

Because of its assumed position in the interconnection market, the LEC can earn whatever profits from interconnection that the market and the regulator will allow. Suppose it sets a high price for interconnection. If it prices its retail service without taking that interconnection price into account, it would reduce the total profits of the firm. On each unit of retail service sold, the LEC would incur two types of costs: the ordinary incremental costs of providing service and the opportunity cost from not providing interconnection (at the high price) for that unit of service. A profit maximizing firm would not sell additional units in the retail market if it realized higher profits from providing interconnection service to its retail competitors.

The only possible explanation for this apparently unprofitable behavior would be that the firm is investing in the destruction of its rivals through predatory pricing. The LEC foregoes profits in the current period in order to drive its competitors from the retail market, raises prices in a later period, and recoups its foregone profits. To succeed, such a strategy requires barriers to entry in the retail market to prevent competitors from re-entering the market during the recoupment period. Since radio licenses are always available to non-LEC competitors and customers incur few costs from switching between suppliers, such a strategy cannot be profitable.²⁶

Simultaneous participation in retail and monopoly wholesale markets does create the theoretical possibility of anticompetitive behavior. However, there is generally no economic incentive to actually engage in such conduct. By way of illustration, we examine below the actual history of competitive behavior by LECs in the paging and cellular markets.

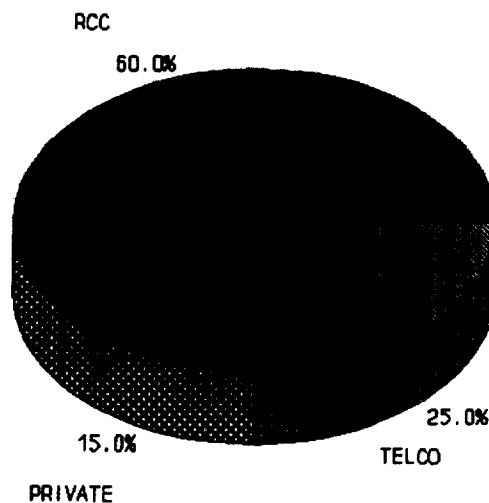
²⁶The presence of resellers in the cellular markets makes switching between the Block A and Block B carrier relatively easy. Indeed, the customer may never know the identity of the actual provider of cellular facilities.

2. History

Wireline participation in mobile markets was considered to be in the public interest because of the technical expertise, financial resources, and national presence of the carriers. Opponents of such participation raised the same concerns as discussed in ¶ 72 of the Notice, but subsequent events have shown these fears to have been misplaced.

We discussed the competitive nature of the cellular markets in Section III.A.1, and a similar story occurred in paging. While telephone companies have been important participants in the paging market, they have always been far from dominant. The largest paging company (Paging Network) is not affiliated with a telephone company, and neither are two of the largest firms in the nationwide paging market (SkyTel and Cue). All told, radio common carriers provide the largest share of paging services with telephone company affiliates serving only about 25 percent of the market. See Figure 4. Like the cellular market, the number of paging subscribers has grown

Figure 4
Market Shares of Paging Providers
1989



rapidly, approximately 20 percent per year. The market is also characterized by entry and success (SkyTel's satellite paging service in 1987) and by exit (MCI's sale of its paging and cellular interests to McCaw in 1986, and the sale of NYNEX paging to Page America in 1990).

Perhaps the best evidence that wireline participation in the cellular market does not foreclose competition comes from the wireline carriers themselves. Telephone companies are permitted to acquire an interest in non-wireline carrier services outside of their territory. Thus in Los Angeles, PacTel competes against the non-wireline carrier which is jointly owned by BellSouth and McCaw. The number of markets in which telephone company cellular affiliates compete with one another is growing rapidly, from about 5 in 1986 to 89 in 1991. Presumably, telephone companies are the most knowledgeable about the real risks from anticompetitive conduct on the part of the wireline cellular carriers. Thus, their enthusiastic acquisition of out-of-region non-wireline franchises is powerful evidence that wireline participation is not a deterrent to competition.

3. Discrimination, Cross-Subsidization, and Non-Structural Safeguards

The relationship between a PCS competitor and a LEC license holder is asymmetric, in that the LEC supplies an essential input to the PCS provider. Suppose the LEC were to charge an interconnection price higher than its own retail PCS price. In this case, retail competitors would be unable to match the LEC's retail price and would presumably be driven from the market. Such anticompetitive behavior would involve discrimination because the LEC would effectively charge its retail business a lower price for interconnection than it charged its competitors. The behavior also involves cross-subsidization because the net revenue to the LEC from its retail service would not cover its retail incremental costs plus the opportunity cost (lost contribution) from not providing interconnection to a competitor. We showed earlier that the LEC would not have an economic incentive to undertake such tactics because they result in lower profits. In the last section, we

showed that there is no evidence that this type of behavior has retarded competition in paging and cellular markets.

In this section, we outline two simple non-structural safeguards (two price floors) which can be used to detect and prevent such anticompetitive behavior. To rule out discrimination, the first price floor would require that the LEC's retail operation and its retail competitors pay the same price for interconnection, less any difference in the cost of supplying that interconnection. This price floor would constrain the LEC's retail price to equal or exceed the sum of three components: (i) the LEC's incremental cost for the non-interconnection component of its retail service, (ii) the price it charges competitors for interconnection, and (iii) the difference in incremental cost in supplying interconnection to itself and to its competitors.

To rule out cross-subsidization, our second price floor would require that the price of the retail service equal or exceed its incremental cost including (as opportunity cost) the contribution (interconnection price less interconnection incremental cost) foregone when the LEC provides the retail service instead of interconnection. This price floor is equivalent to the rule that the retail service be priced so that its contribution equals or exceeds the contribution from interconnection.

It is easily shown that these two price floors are mathematically identical. Thus, so long as the LEC prices its retail service at or above the sum of its retail incremental cost and its foregone contribution from interconnection, these anticompetitive concerns are eliminated. Moreover, as we showed earlier, a profit-seeking firm would not knowingly price below this floor, so that there is little need for enforcement.

Further mathematical manipulation of this price floor shows that it has additional efficiency properties.

1. If the LEC and its competitors all price the retail service as low as possible, the LEC will have the lowest price if and only if it has the lowest incremental cost of providing the service. Thus it is neither advantaged nor disadvantaged in the retail market by its provision of interconnection to its competitors.
2. The floor is cost-based because it sets the difference between the retail and wholesale service prices no lower than the difference between the retail and wholesale incremental costs.
3. It rules out cross subsidization because it insures that the LEC obtains at least as much contribution from its competitive retail services as it does from its non-competitive interconnection service.

B. Horizontal Anticompetitive Effects are Unlikely

While the Notice focuses on cross-subsidization and discrimination from LEC participation in PCS markets, the fact that "over time PCS may become a full fledged competitor to wireline services,"²⁷ raises the issue of concentration and competition in the market for access to the PSTN. Substitution between PCS and landline service is a much-discussed, tantalizing possibility, offering the hope of cutting the copper umbilical cord so that people can call people instead of places. Despite these hopes, however, we show below that PCS and landline services do not compete in the same product market. Thus supply of both services by the local exchange carrier would have no horizontal anticompetitive effect.

First, landline and current cellular services are certainly in different product markets. Taking usage prices and the cost of the telephone into account, the monthly price of cellular service

²⁷Notice, ¶ 71.

in 1990 was about \$95,²⁸ compared with an average residential local exchange price, including unlimited local calling, of about \$18.²⁹ Moreover, obtaining access by a cellular phone commits the subscriber to obtaining usage through the cellular company. The price of an average switched interLATA toll call during the day is about \$0.20 - \$0.25 per minute. The price of cellular usage ranges between \$0.30 and \$0.50 per minute, so that the price of a toll call through a cellular carrier would be more than twice the price using landline access. Subscriber costs of the new digital cellular systems are expected to be roughly half that of the current analog cellular carriers.³⁰ If wideband PCS prices converge to about that level, PCS will still be significantly more expensive than landline service.

Second, mobile services will probably not have sufficient capacity to compete in the near term for ubiquitous landline local service. Currently, cellular capacity in each MSA is about 500,000 subscribers which will expand considerably when new digital services are implemented. However, current cellular penetration is only between 3 and 4 percent, while residential landline penetration is about 95 percent. In addition, cellular (and PCS) capacity for access to the network depends on peak use, while landline capacity for access does not, since landline access is supplied through a loop dedicated to a single customer. Landline usage per subscriber is currently about 10 times cellular usage per subscriber. Thus it appears unlikely that current technology and spectrum could support widespread substitution of radio for landline service to provide access to the PSTN in the near future.

²⁸Rohlfs, Jackson, and Kelly, op. cit., p. 18.

²⁹Federal Communications Commission, Monitoring Report, CC Docket 87-339, July 1991, p. 153.

³⁰J.R. Wickens, N.J. Parker, and B. Blowstein, "PCNs: What's Out, What's New and What's Around the Corner," Telocator, January 1991, p. 26.

Finally, even if substantial substitution occurs between PCS and wireline services at some point in the future, it does not follow that LECs should be denied the ability to acquire a PCS license. The PSTN should be constructed using the most efficient technology--whatever that may be. Radio-based access to the PSTN may be, in certain circumstances, the technology of choice. And if radio technology continues to improve, there is a chance that mobile telephony might replace landline service more pervasively, at least in supplying low bandwidth access to the PSTN. Ironically, it is in this market that local exchange carriers are currently least subject to competition and, consequently, most pervasively regulated. Thus permitting a LEC to acquire a PCS license might--in the distant future--reduce the number of competitors in the low bandwidth access market by one. However, that reduction should have no harmful effect on economic efficiency because--for the foreseeable future--regulation will control service prices in that market.

C. Gains from Integration are Significant

The history of mobile telecommunications in the U.S. shows a strong relationship between the participation of local exchange carriers and the successful development of the market. Landline participation in cellular and paging markets was perceived as important at the time because the wireline carriers had a wealth of experience, technical expertise, and resources. In the cellular market, it was AT&T (then a wireline carrier) that was the primary developer of the technology, and the wirelines were seen as the key to creating national networks.³¹

Many of the same considerations apply to wideband PCS. The large number of small cell sites and the switching and transport requirements of the backhaul network embed the PCS

³¹Report, pp. 63-64.

network in the PSTN to a greater extent than for cellular or paging networks. As a result, one could expect to find large economies of scope between PCS and the PSTN based on shared switching and transport facilities. Evidence that these savings are significant is shown by the interest of non-LEC local networks in the PCS market. For example, (i) Cox Enterprises is testing a CDMA broadband PCS system embedded in its cable television infrastructure;³² (ii) PCS permits have been issued to other cable providers such as Cablevision Systems Corp., Continental Cablevision, Time Warner, and Comcast; and (iii) the largest cellular provider, McCaw, and the largest cable operator, TCI, announced a joint test of McCaw's cellular system integrated into TCI's coaxial and fiber network.³³ Among the metropolitan area networks, Metropolitan Fiber holds experimental PCS licenses. From this activity, we conclude that (i) there are sufficient cost savings from integrated provision of PCS and local network services that it would be wasteful to exclude the LEC networks from participation, and (ii) if PCS grows and becomes a significant fraction of local traffic, LECs will have to be able to supply PCS on an integrated basis to compete as a local network.

At the same time, the LEC network will be required to supply infrastructure for competitors' PCS networks. It is likely to be the case that supplying interconnection and network services to PCS competitors will require facilities and architectures that differ from those used to provide ordinary wireline services. Thus costs of interconnection to all parties would be substantially reduced if the LEC were permitted to participate in the PCS business itself.

On the network side, radio-based access to the voice network is increasingly the technology of choice in certain circumstances. If the LEC is to fulfill its mandate to provide local exchange service in the most efficient manner, it must have a full complement of radio-based services

³²"Cox Completes Second Segment of PCS-Cable Test," Radio Communications Report, June 29, 1992. On October 8, 1992, the FCC awarded Cox a Pioneer's Preference for its technology.

³³"Experiment Used to Justify Cable's PCS Advantage," Radio Communications Report, March 9, 1992.

in its technology portfolio. For example, cordless payphones substitute directly for LEC payphone services, and where such substitution is economical, we incur a first-order efficiency loss if the LEC were forbidden to use the more efficient technology.

V. AUCTIONS ARE THE MOST EFFICIENT METHOD OF ASSIGNING SPECTRUM

The ultimate economic goal of spectrum allocation is to facilitate the flow of spectrum towards its highest valued use, a task for which free markets are especially well suited and for which administrative processes are not. Based on recent experience in allocating cellular licenses, administrative allocation is fraught with delay³⁴ and transactions costs, from which we conclude, paradoxically, that less effort should be devoted to the initial assignment of licenses.

However PCS licenses are initially distributed, they should be freely bought and sold among parties that are financially and technically capable of operating them. The complex process of sorting licenses for different territories across firms in some efficient manner is best left to the aftermarket for licenses to accomplish. The ability and efficiency of the market for licenses to accomplish the intricate task of geographic rationalization is evident from recent experience in both the paging and cellular markets.

In paging, the most rapid area of growth is in regional service. Paging companies have organized expanded local paging areas by joint ventures and partnerships, by affiliations of independent companies, and by acquiring the same paging frequencies in different markets. Technological change has helped the process: pagers have been developed which scan the paging

³⁴The cellular license process began with applications for the 30 largest SMSAs in June of 1982. By the end of 1984, systems had been licensed in 32 metropolitan areas, rising to 206 by 1987. The allocation process shifted to a lottery system in 1986 for the last 216 SMSAs and all 428 rural service areas (RSAs). By 1989, at least one license had been granted in every SMSA.

channels or the FM subcarrier frequencies making it possible to organize a wide-area paging network without obtaining exclusive use of a single frequency. The regulatory climate has also been helpful, making additional spectrum available for paging use and relaxing restrictions on existing paging frequencies.³⁵

The same process is taking place in the cellular markets. McCaw, for example, has coordinated its acquisitions to create eight major clusters serving about 100 MSAs. At the same time, it has sold dispersed interests in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama. Integration was an important motivation for the LIN acquisition:

"The need for rationalization and consolidation into logical regional groupings is what underlies our offer for LIN and our agreement to buy Metromedia's New York interests. Combined with our corporate properties, they create the potential for state-of-the-art, integrated systems in the Northeast, Texas and California."³⁶

All other major carriers follow similar strategies. The obvious trend in the markets for cellular licenses is to cluster.

From these trends, it is clear that however licenses are geographically distributed at the outset, they will quickly be rationalized by the license market. In this regard, the trend towards removal of restrictions on resale of paging and cellular licenses is helpful, and the rules for exchanging PCS licenses should be no more restrictive.³⁷

³⁵The number of conventional paging channels has increased from 8 in 1981 to 96 today. Restrictions on use of private paging systems have been relaxed, three paging frequencies have been allocated to nationwide paging use, and FM broadcast stations have been allowed to offer paging services on their subcarrier frequencies.

³⁶Craig McCaw, McCaw Cellular Communications, Inc., Cellular Communications: A Vision of the Future 7, October 20, 1989, cited in Report p. 100.

³⁷For example, the wireline/nonwireline dichotomy in both paging and cellular licensing has not been imposed on the resale market.

As a distribution mechanism, auctions are the most efficient method of allocating spectrum.³⁸ In general, the license is sold to the party that values it the most, for under certain circumstances, the price actually paid (or its expectation) is the valuation that the runner-up places on the license.³⁹ Administrative costs are low because only the winning bidder needs to show that it meets technical or financial requirements.

The second best alternative, a lottery, is efficient only because the aftermarket for licenses will correct the random allocation that the lottery produces. Moreover, based on the experience with the cellular lotteries, administrative costs are likely to be high because of the large number of participants. While admission fees and more complex lottery applications would reduce the size of the participant pool--and thus reduce administrative expenses--costs of complex applications are pure social waste. A lottery would not make it more likely that small firms would receive and operate licenses; assuming efficient resale markets, licenses should flow to the hands of the parties that value them the most, irrespective of size. All a lottery would do to encourage small firm participation is award valuable property to firms or individuals at random. The only compelling advantage a lottery has over an auction is that lotteries are currently permitted under law while auctions are not.

If there is no change in the FCC's authority to conduct auctions, the best alternative distribution mechanism would be a postcard lottery⁴⁰ followed by an FCC-sponsored competitive auction. The object would be to minimize the cost and complexity of the lottery, since the only

³⁸See, e.g., R.P. McAfee and J. McMillan, "Auctions and Bidding," *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. XXV, (June 1987), pp. 699-738. Spectrum auctions appeal not only to economists; they have been endorsed by members of the Commission and by recent U.S. presidents.

³⁹At least for a first price sealed bid auction.

⁴⁰A postcard lottery requires the minimal amount of information from participants. See the Notice, ¶ 85.

outcome of importance for efficiency would be the result of the auction. No qualifications would be required of applicants, though parties should be limited to a single entry for an individual or corporate entity. Shortly after the lottery, perhaps allowing time for other market mechanisms to work, the Commission would sponsor an optional auction in which licenses would be sold to the highest bidder. The principal advantage of this lottery/auction is that it is nearly as efficient as an ordinary auction in allocating PCS licenses to appropriate parties. The major disadvantage is that the proceeds--reflecting the enormous valuation people appear to place on spectrum rights--would be randomly distributed across the personal and corporate landscape rather than flowing to the government.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, David G. Richards, hereby certify that on November 9, 1992, a copy of the foregoing "PCS Comments" was served by United States Mail, postage prepaid to the parties on the attached list, unless otherwise noted.

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